

## The Emotional Impact of Trying to Conceive

For many people, the decision to have a baby is taken for granted as a 'normal' phase in one's life. Therefore, if a couple or individual experience difficulty in conceiving, it can raise complex emotional issues. Family, community and cultural expectations can add to the pressure. Couples are faced with the decision of whether to share their challenges in conceiving with family or friends, or keep it a private process. This is a personal decision, but either way, people often experience insensitive comments from others. Whether it is well meaning advice on how to fall pregnant, or queries about when they are starting a family, it can be hard to deal with.

Conception difficulties can be one of the most stressful times for a couple, who often feel isolated and alone in their experience. This can be even greater for a single person trying to conceive, without a life partner for support. Emotional reactions vary, but very commonly people experience feelings of shock and disbelief, denial, anger and jealousy, sadness and depression. Feelings of failure are common, with self esteem being adversely affected. During this tumultuous emotional time, important decisions regarding possible fertility treatment options often need to be made, which can feel overwhelming and confusing.

It can also require a reassessment for couples, in regard to life choices and direction. The process of trying to conceive can become all-consuming, leaving little desire or interest in other activities or pastimes. Often couples put things on hold, such as jobs, study, holidays or other life changes, whilst trying to conceive, adding to the feelings of being in 'limbo'. This can be especially difficult when partners have different coping mechanisms and philosophical views. Often while dealing with fertility issues, family and friends are having babies, and life can begin to include birth celebrations and other child orientated activities, which can compound feelings of isolation.

It can help to understand these feelings and emotions are completely normal, and you are not alone in your experience. Self care, both emotional and physical is important, as is maintaining balance in your life and relationship. Below is an outline of some strategies which may be helpful during this journey:

### Strategies

**Communication** between couples is vital. It is important you both have a clear understanding of each other's perspective, hopes and fears. For example, do you have a shared vision of possible treatment options and how long you are prepared to pursue them?

**Seek support.** Whether it be family, a good friend or a professional, it is important you are able to share your feelings.

**Be informed.** Ensure you have a good rapport with your health professional, and you are informed about your own health status and options.

**Intimacy** and fun can be neglected in the 'mechanics' of trying to conceive, and can lead to sex feeling like hard work; make a concerted effort to keep sex fun and loving.

**Continue with hobbies,** sports or interests you have. It is important to keep balance in your life, and seek enjoyment from a range of activities.

**Don't put your life on hold.** Start the course you are interested in, plan the holiday or apply for the job. If you become pregnant you will manage around these plans!

**Take care of yourself.** If invitations to family or friends' activities involving children are hard right now, give yourself permission to make your apologies, or limit the time you attend. Plan an activity you enjoy afterwards.



**View your health holistically.** A healthy, well-balanced diet, exercise and a relaxed state of mind will all contribute to your overall well being. Yoga or meditation can assist in relaxation and stress management. Diet and nutrition advice can help with ensuring a healthy balanced diet.

In theory many of these strategies seem very straightforward, however, in practice it isn't always so easy! Counselling, both for individuals and couples, can help to facilitate the process of managing the emotional impact of fertility challenges and contribute to your overall wellbeing.

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